



Sunset at the South Pole

The sun is down, and the 58 of us that remain here are settling in for a long, cold winter. We had an amazing weeklong sunset at the end of March. The top of the sun's crest stayed on the horizon for some time, but the real show started as the sun finally dipped below the visible horizon. Because of the extreme cold temperatures at the surface of the

South Pole, the air is warmer as you rise. This unusual phenomenon enables us, through refraction, to see things that are actually below the horizon. For this reason we were treated to two nights of amazing green and blue flashes radiating from the sun after it had set.

For the past couple of weeks we have been in limbo between night and day. Venus has been visible in the night sky for some time, and we finally have our first stars appearing in the twilight. The temperatures have grown noticeably colder as well. We have been between -70 and -85F since the sun went down. The winds have died down, which makes it more bearable to go outside. Still though, even with an 11 knot wind, today's windchill factor was -134F, with an ambient temperature of -80F.

The winter crew is getting along well, and we've got a lot of community events that keep us occupied. We have some of the world's best astronomers/astrophysicists wintering with us. Every Sunday a scientist puts on a presentation, usually explaining some of the unique things that we are able to see from our location at the bottom of the world. Most of the experiments at Pole occur during the winter, and all are now underway collecting data. For most of the science community, their busy time of the year is over, and it is now time to sit back and pray that nothing breaks.

The biggest change so far between winter and summer has been the opening of the new South Pole Station. The current station is a geodesic dome that was completed in 1975. At that time there were only fifty or so people at Pole in the summer, and a winter crew of seventeen or eighteen. The Pole is now home to up to 225 in the summer and 58 or more in the winter. These numbers are expected to grow, as more and more researches are looking to conduct their work at Pole.

The new station is a definite change from the old. While a good deal is still under construction, the galley and berthing areas are complete. We've got about forty of our winter crew housed up there now, and we eat all of our meals in the new galley. It is about five times as large as our old galley, and has windows, which the old galley did not. For my part I have elected to remain in the old station. I really like the dome, and this will probably be the last crew to get the chance to live there.

Other than that not too much is going on. One thing that I worried about before coming down is that my time here would be extremely tedious, and I would grow incredibly bored. I have found it to be just the opposite. Days and weeks seem to fly by here. It is a great stress free lifestyle that we live here, and it is nice to be removed from the hectic pace of the outside world.

